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APPHO IN LEVKAS AND OTHER POEMS



WILLIAM ALEXANDER PERCY



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SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

AND OTHER POEMS

By
WILLIAM ALEXANDER PERCY



NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON: HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
MDCCCCXV

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TO
H. B.

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SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

SONG

O singing heart, think not of aught save song;
Beauty can do no wrong.
Let but th' inviolable music shake
Golden on golden flake,
Down to the human throng,
And one, one surely, will look up and hear and wake.

Weigh not the rapture; measure not nor sift
God's dark, delirious gift;
But deaf to immortality or gain,
Give as the shining rain,
Thy music pure and swift,
And here or there, sometime, somewhere, 'twill reach
the grain.

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Zeus, my Father, once again
I stand before Thee ; once, and then no more.
Here in the calm, deep night,
Far, far from Lesbos and the madness there,
Here, where the alien sea about my feet
Is clean and sacred with Thine awe,
I come, Sappho, Thy child alone,
To speak with Thee as in the old, exalted days.
In this last hour,
Before the cool, regardless hand of death
Erase me quite, desiring most to be
Most noble, I would break like nard before
Thy night-encurtained majesty my heart—
From hurt or shame withholding naught ;
Tell all, give thanks, and cease.
Nor would I have the flame of this, my prayer and
baring,
Shake with the breath of bitterness.
Nor stay my heart, self-pitying,
On that last human littleness,
Resentment 'gainst the gods.

Thanks, Father, for
The life that Thou hast given me.
For it was high and full of joy—akin
To those bright mountain spaces where
A golden exaltation holds the peaks.

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Never, methinks, with more enamored hand
Hast Thou coaxed fire into the clay, than when
In Lesbos, mine own mother grew with me.
To Thee be thanks that in all life
'Twas mine to see goodness; that I, a woman,
Beyond the tragic and the base of life,
Have seen to that serenity of right that flows
Increasingly and always onward. Mine
Companions were that proved the race Thine off-
spring;
Heroes and kings, sea-wanderers, poets, priests,—
All, all, who, fervent, pass
The flame of righteousness and truth
To sequent generations yet asleep; and I
Among them equal, praised and loved.
More, Father; Thou hast given me the gift
Of fragrant, fiery speech.
Beyond the violet-circled isles, yea, to
The confines of the habitable world
My singing reached; nor can I think
The time comes ever when the hearts of men
So stripped of brightness be
But they will shake with rapture of my songs.
Thou hast made beauty mine own element,
Taught me to drift, a burnished leaf,
Down the long winds of ecstasy;
And ever loveliness has swept my heart
With lyric hand of rapture. Mine to feel
The majesty and tears and color of the sea;
The awe and high obedience of the stars;
To watch at eve the saffron of Thy garment's hem;

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

To wake unto Thy midnight messengers,
The purple winds that roam infinity.
Yea, I, undoubtingly, have known
The signs of immanent divinity
In darkness, dawn, and dusk; and most,
In music's passioning, when on the green,
Beneath a frail, enchanted moon,
Some bard with mad, pale mouth sang urgently!

To think nobility like mine could be
Flawed—shattered utterly—and by—
This, this the shame, O Zeus, that Thou must hear—
A slim, brown shepherd boy with windy eyes
And spring upon his mouth!
Mine Thou hast made the courage to face truth,
Tho' truth were death; but face alone!
Before Thine eyes to strip my passion till
Naked its evil gleams—here—now—oh, all
The harsh and iron of my soul must forth
Ere shame's rebellion in my blood be quelled,
And Thou familiar made with my reproach! . . .
Courage and truth, these two are not of earth!
Hearken Thou, Zeus, and judge if, at the last,
In spite of all, I am not half divine,
Loving these two.

It was the hour of fleeing stars—
If I should live to see a million dawns,
Each magic with a strange perfection of its own,
The memory of none could stir as that
The pool of tears and longing here within.
The hour of fleeing stars—

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

And I, too, fled into the stillness,
Up from the quiet village to the hills
Where walk the morning-mooded gods.

A dawn of dew and hyacinths,
With grey-eyed, silver-footed April loose
Upon the hills. The arching air—the last few stars—
Each little leaf, tho' hushed, a-tremble to
The throbbing up of azure-hearted spring.
The upper meadows I had gained,
When on the eager silence came a sound,
A sleepy sound of many little feet.
Above the road I drew me up, and watched
The flock drift by. They passed, a huddled herd,
Shyly, and after them, with loitering foot
And bent, dark-curling head, the shepherd lad.—
Down, down, O heart of mine!—I feared to breathe
Lest breathing wake me from a dear enchantment;
I dared not move, lest moving stir the spell . . .
So leaned above the roadside—gazing—
Drinking the poison of his loveliness.
For he was lovelier than the youthful day;
More beautiful than silver, naked Ganymede!
Slowly he came beneath me on the road—
And suddenly I heard
The tremulous, soft magic give me speech.
"Shepherd, thy name!" He raised his head;
The wonder of his mouth and eyes and carven throat
Flooded me. And he smiled. So full
Of sweetness were those eyes, those curving lips,
A music as of tears swept through my veins;

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

And when his voice rose, answering,
As cool, unhurt, and clear it was
As is the bird-souled break of day.
“Phaon,” he said, and, smiling still, passed on.—
Thus, Zeus, at dawn, seeking as was my wont,
The viewless god’s companionship,
Phaon I met, himself in curve and color godlike,
And, meeting him, lost Thee!

When shining day aroused the earth and me,
I turned me from that roadside home, full-fledged
In Aphrodite. Not the gales of spring
Dashing the tenuous, frayed clouds high up the sky,
Were plumed with wilder rapture than my heart!
Nor was the earth’s red longing for fruition
More hot than mine for Phaon . . .
Oh, I had loved the colors of the world,
All lofty things, all daring enterprise,
The glint and foam of life’s adventuring!
That hour changed all the world and me!
Cool sleep became a haunted thing,
Full of the boy untruly amorous;
And waking, pain—a disillusionment
That filled the lonely day with thirst.
At dawn, at dusk, my feet sought out the hills
Beloved of shepherd folk, that, haply, sight of him
Might stay the burning here.
To glimpse his loveliness, to hear his voice
Answering lightly my light questionings
Was sweetness more than mortal thing,
More than the gods’ ambrosial dalliance—

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

And bitterness, my heart, and bitterness!

✕ Oh, I grew studious in unlearning life,
Till I could feign simplicity,

And use the simple speech of shepherd folk.

My utmost intellect was bent to plan

Assurance of chance meetings;

My craft in beauty to devise which way

The yellow crocus in my hair might take his praise.

At feasts and country festivals,

When came the dark and stars, I, too, came, there

To see his bending body in the dance.

With not more grace, beneath the twilight breeze

Bending, the long-stemmed asphodel is swayed.

But always something of his grace,

His inextinguishable happiness,

Would seem to break my heart, and I would long to be

Freed from that loneliness men call esteem,

And there within the dance, a country wench,

Touching his shining arms, and breathing close

His lithe and burning youth.

O Thou hast known

The thousand years and each year's thousand lovers—

What need to tell the pangs and tricks of clay

Common to all; yea, e'en at last to me, Thy child!

Father, it seemed not evil then—so sweet

He was; and I, who, most of all the world

Loved purity and loathèd lust,

Became the mark of mine own scorning ere

I knew—he was so sweet!

A something from the freshness of the woods,

Of cool and shining leaves, of laggard winds,

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

His beauty seemed to catch. I think
The momentary blood that lights the rose
Fired his veins with vintage of delight
Perpetually. No lovelier
The first strong tulip, whose crimson arrogance
Lords it above blythe Eresos, and daunts
The lesser darlings of pale April, than
His mouth . . . And this, a shepherd boy!
His thoughts the thoughts of shepherds; his desires,
The bread and water cravings of the poor.
No trembling from the madness of my songs
Could reach his heart; no lofty converse call
One cloud of questioning within
His strange, unshadowed, listening eyes.
His lore was of the leaves, the clouds, the winds,
What time the fields, a-frost with heliotrope,
Yield richer pasturage; what time,
The starrier meadows of wild broom.

This, this my lover! Mine, whose choice of mate
Was bidden guest in all the courts
And goodly palaces of Greece!
Lo, I, whose name was crowned thro' all the isles
With praise and reverence,
Grew stranger to the life that had been mine;
Transmuted from the very certitude
Of right example to reproach; become
As vacillant, weak flame before the wind of lust.
Yet, not, O Father, stained with deed of wantonness.
I could not quite escape that holiness

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

The sacred years had bred !
Methinks, the shepherd boy will never know
But that one fragrant with a nobleness
He dimly felt, had found him for a space
In some strange wise companionable.
And at the last he loved me, Zeus ! Oh, not
As lovers love—less than the shepherds' strife
Of skill, less than the glowing dance,
Or merry gossip when the wine-vat teems.
This irony for only anodyne
Of all my pain Thou tenderest me—
Out of the evil of my passioning came good !
For Phaon, Phaon loved me as a goddess sent,
And, curbing grossness, looked to me for praise . . .
Perhaps his blood was clean of lust,
The mountains and the winds being pure,
Or else his years, maturing loveliness,
Left green that mortal taint.
O soft, soft lies, beguile me not !
Altho' by me unroused,
No doubt his manhood's proof will flaunt before
The red and white of some broad-bosomed wench
Of his own kind—when I am gone !

Oh, swiftly, swiftly, scorning shame,
Tell all, my heart, and make perpetual end . . .
Thou send'st to mortals night as comforter ;
And when the rounded moon breathes up the east,
Dost think to ease our most immedicable griefs
With loveliness. But I am still
Weary and broken with the memory

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Of such a night, vouchsafèd lately.
Lesbos, my own, lay drowned beneath
The warm and argent flood of light—so still,
The very olive trees unstirring slept
A silver sleep. But, ah, to me the night
Was terrible with perfumes from the hair
And breasts of Aphrodite; within my blood,
Unstaunchable, surged all the undertow of spring,
Dragging my soul unto the sea that knows no law.
Haggard and parched, love's frenzy caught me up
And bore me from my dream-hot bed into the night.
My feet unconscious chose those pastures known
To love. The way was haunted with him; here
He stood; here leaned upon his crook to watch the
dawn;
Here lifted up the wonder of his eyes.
And on the visioning leapt all the pity of
My life—vexing and hounding me.

About me, moonlight, stillness, empty night;
Distraught, I stumbled on.
A light, near footstep sounded suddenly;
I lifted filmy eyes; saw; reeled; and saw
Again—Phaon, the shepherd. Then madness broke.
His argent throat and arms,
His mouth, the dew, the tenderness—O God!—
I bent me to him with the flaming cry,
“Phaon—I love thee; one kiss, one kiss—Phaon!”
A silence came. The night grew huge and cold.
Silence. I lifted heavily,
A nightmare weight, my lids and looked upon the boy.

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Amazement held him, wonder ; quick
His eyes avoided mine, then, dubious, sought ;
And in the miserable stillness there,
I watched the radiance leave his face,
And pain steal up like age. Within me died
All fire. I closed my eyes ; the night whirled past.
Anguish like bolted lightning showed
In that long instant what myself had been to him—
One alien to the lowness of his life ;
Almost a holy thing, a-stir with God,
That now revealèd stood of common grossness.
As dreadful as their lovelessness,
The scorning that I knew his eyes would show !
Tho' never loved, yet never to be loathed—
That mean respect at least my pride might save !
I woke, beheld the desperate urgency,
And faced him with a lie that heaven sent.
“O shepherd, I leave Lesbos, home, and thee
At dawn. Good-bye.” Then hid from him my face,
And bowed before the surge of agony.
I needed not to see his joyous tenderness
Pulse back ; I knew, how bitterly !
Before him, broken, cold, and blind, I felt
Him take me in his arms, all gentleness,
And on my mouth lay his, a long, long kiss.
The music of his voice was far away ;
“Come soon again to Lesbos and the shepherds here
Who love thee” . . .

Thus,
As I had prayed, I lay upon his breast,
And in his cloudy glamour was wrapped close,

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

And breathed the fragrance of his neck and hair—
Yet not as I had prayed. Midmost
The snatch of starved, impossible delight—
His lips to mine—the reeling moonlight—passion—
I knew the irony, the tragic mockery.
While yet I clung to him, he seemed
Almost a child, sweet as a child is sweet,
Unsparingly; and I—
Old—in the world and sin and vision, old;
He but a shepherd boy; and I—Sappho!
So when he had released me from his arms,
Stricken and blind, with one swift kiss
Upon his brow, one sobbed “Good-bye,” I turned;
So, fleeing, down into the darkness.

Unto perfection I was born;
The shepherd boy, who would not see my sin,
Recalled me to myself. That was the end . . .
Imperative to keep my soul superb,
For his sake, mine, and Thine,
And one sole method to that end.
But lest my resolution should be wax
Beneath his nearness, and because I chose
To speak with Thee apart, in calm,
I minded me of those, my lying words.
Therefore, when morning bore the harbor ships
Upon their devious, blue wanderings,
Myself, beneath a glistening sail, wide-eyed,
Gazed on the fading island that I loved,
A last, long time on Lesbos . . .

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Think not, O Zeus, I render me to death
Because the shepherd loved me not.
Such pain as many mortals bear,
Myself would scorn to shun.
Sternier than unrequited love the cause,
And not unpitiful. . . . Perhaps in time
My burnt, high-bosomed beauty might have lured
His blood—No, no! not that! not possible!
Hearken, O God, the truth, the utter truth!
Had mine been siren sorcery
To draw him tremulous to my desire,
And had he answered love with love,
Passion with passion, ardent equally—
I know that I had cooled—the wanton's trick—
Found tedious what had been bliss, grown strange,
At last, despised! More—more—I stifle—
If far from Lesbos and from him
I should remain—I should forget the boy!
And this—indignant heart of mine, I will not lie—
Could Phaon's magic pass,
Yet other snares, perhaps as sweet—if such
Could be,—would trap and madden me as his.
Some summer-tinted mouth, some curvèd throat;
The Bacchic grace of some young body, bare
And glistening in the games—I know . . . I
know . . .
Perhaps some throbbing, lawless-eyed barbarian,
Sea-burnt, gorgeous, and bestial—
Surely, not that, my God!
But always I shall be

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Hurt with the vehemence of too, too perfect beauty;
Bare and resistless always
To all the sorceries of fair, fair flesh! . . .

Enough . . . The truth hath sickened me . . .
But all is told, and now comes rest.
I would make calm my brow and heart for death.
One step across this darkling cliff, and in
The ocean's weary breathing I am caught,
Made one, assuaged forever. Yet I pause . . .
The bitter sea with its pale tentacles
Of foam half seen below my feet cannot
Now make me truckle unto cowardice,
Who knew not fear in life . . . But is it life,
Not death, I dare not face? 'Tis surely ill
The wine of life to spill contemptuously,
Wearied, in wantonness, or in despite.
If, though, the wine of its own nature sour,
Lose all the jewel and the perfume, shall
The drinker pause to cast it back to earth?
Why spare the rose
Doomed to the worm? The soul incurably
Hurt with a crescent sin? T' avoid
The loosened shaft of seen necessity
Is wisdom, not some trick of fear.

To me, my kinship with immortal things
Hath been too clear revealed that I should watch
With willingness my retrogression to the clay
And baseness mortals own as parent.
Either the starry, wind-swept, sea-enraptured soul

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Of me, myself, myself shall last unto the end,
Or summonable death shall quench me out
Undimmed, exalted still.

No cowardice, O Zeus, I swear!

With all my spirit I have ever fought
Life's battles; nor testing conflict shunned,
When righteousness made part. But when the enemy
Thou sett'st against me is the sacred element,
The prime nobility that wings my spirit,
What boots the battle? And the event—defeat
Or victory alike—is utter ruin.

To me hath beauty been the ripple and the light
That proved a sea divine,
Sweeping the stars, our little universe, all, all,
Into the wave of some sublime and glittering doom.

Oh, always beauty was to me
Thyself half seen, my Father.

In windy leaves and grass, thy laughter loose,
In yellow noon, thy nectared, slumberous ease,
Thy clean and lofty joy in high, sun-stricken woods,
In storms thy restlessness, thyself
In this vast, darkling sea.

And this same beauty now betrayeth me.
So long as life by it is made divine,
So long by it am I made harlot-hearted.

No cure, no cure! but oh,
That such perfection in such wise should be
Rifted, and out of harmony!
Methinks, Thyself, the author of the flaw,
Must doubt Thy fathering wisdom.
Indeed, indeed, beneath their calm content,

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Thou and the other gods must feel the tears
That make the human breast almost divine,
To see me thus, alone and lonely,
That once was Sappho, song o' the world. . . .
And yet no wind of heaven beareth me
Breath of compassioning. . . . Perhaps they laugh or
scorn.

Oh, can it be that in the halls of heaven
The very gods are tainted with the Cyprian's sin?
What if the bestial gossip told of them be true,
And too authentic be the lecherous tales
Of Io and the rest?

Then will I break with all the gods,
And more divine than they, snuff out this flame
Ere it be vile with universal degradation!
O night, O night, am I the only struggling thing?
Doth any cry save mine rise to thy stars
Against the tyranny of flesh and mortal grossness?
O mothering darkness, fold
Obliteration closer round me, for
Mine eyes blur, and my throat is hurt
With welling pain. . . . Tears, tears,
Ye rob me of the little left me, godly pride,
And leave me woman. . . .

And I had thought the hour that summed
And closed my lonely struggle for perfection,
Had been a thing of triumph. It is pitiful.
Leaning across this sea here in the night,
A moment's space from death, I can recall
No old, high legend whereupon to lean my heart.

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Instead, I seem to know the rain-grey, hungering eyes
Calypso bent across the surge that gave
And took forever her delight.

The deep air, too, seems somehow cleansed with tears,
And cooler grown. The stars are not so close.
A breath of silver up the sky! Again—
Dawn! dawn! O Zeus,
The dawn that I had thought to never see!
Eastward the cold light brims into the sky
And joyous sweeps away the stars that watched with
me.

They come no more. . . . Dawn. . . . Dawn, and
spring again!

This grey and lucent hour, light sleep
Steals from the shepherds' clustered curls,
And leaves them dewy as the bended grass.
At home it is a dawn of dew and hyacinths,
With silver-footed April loose upon the hills.

Along the curving road the flocks
Lag half asleep, lag, but still come
Nearer and nearer till—
Oh, the insufferable beauty of his bending head!
O home! O Lesbos!

To lean above that roadside, breathless,
And see again the shepherd boy I love—
His thonged and sandalled grace—
His bare, brown throat—
The violets careless round his head—
Those eyes of spring and unawakened fire—
The dew and roses of the mouth that once I kissed!
Forget, forget all else, O gods, and grant this boon!

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Bear me back home to Lesbos and the boy!
Steep me but one short hour in his love!
Oh, let the anguished crimson of his mouth
Seek fire from mine, and all his brown, light grace
Flame into strength to crush my paleness; let
His morning eyes know drought and noon,
The haze of hidden tears, the film of hope,
And me the only cool and dew.
One misty, scarlet kiss within your arms—
Phaon! Phaon!
I would forswear song—beauty—Zeus, my father . . .

Ah,—madness—madness—uncoil, old anguish! . . .
Ah!
O cool, grey wind of dawn! O sea!—
Thou harlot-hearted woman, sleep!
And wake thou, Sappho, leafy-templed child of God!
Upon the lovely world another day. . . .
Come, fearless, piteous heart of mine . . .
come. . . .
At last the comfort and the cleansing of the sea.

CHORUS

(After the Greek)

Surely in no benignant mood
The gods have fashioned us, but craftily
To send us homing to the sod
Wise only in our own futility.

With hyacinthine brows of youth,
We enter life as to a festival;
But, ere the feast is spread, the gods
Snatch back the wine, the song, the coronal.

And, lusterless, we turn, afraid,
Turn to the sole vouchsafèd heritage,
And in the shaken darkness clutch
The disenchanted ledges of old age.

TO A MOCKING-BIRD

Thy taunting happiness,
Thy overbold upflashing bliss,
Pierces my heart to-night, O mocking-bird !
Beneath the limpid surge of darkness,
The awe of stars and all the hush,
Thou flingest far thy little joy, unawed—
Flushed with some momentary triumph,
Or stray, delicious whim.
The tumult of thy silver mockery
Shakes through the trees, across the trancèd lawn,
And rouses weariness to pain within my heart.
Cease, cease thy rapture !
To-night the courage and the joy are gone ;
I would forget the battles and the ceaseless clash,
The long, rewardless surge of strife,
The race run and no laurels,
The fight fought and no guerdon.
To-night, only to-night, 'tis sweet
No more to buffet with the winds of grief
But bend to them, luxuriously abandoned.
Again the light notes leap
In gusts of gaiety !
Ah, bird, thy song, derisive of defeat
And age and the inevitable doom,
Is but the song of mine own people—
The conquerors, the unafraid—
And thou, in thy bright arrogance and fearless bliss

TO A MOCKING-BIRD

Summest the spirit of a newer age,
The unprophetic confidence
Of this new-sinewed western world.

Cease, cease thy song of triumph and unwisdom !
To-night I long to hear an alien sweetness that
Long vision hath made sad.
Oh, for a silver-steepèd garden overseas,
Hung with too poignant perfumes,
Where thy frail sister lifts her piteous cry,
Her little hidden cry,
Sharp with a hundred centuries of pain,
Hurt with the constant woe,
The weariness and all the tears
Of generations that have gone, darkly !
Oh, to forget this western flaunt of living !
To breathe in those far lands that air
Breathèd by dreamers dead, lovely and purposeless ;
To hear the anguished nightingale that Sappho heard ;
To see beneath the moon the olive trees
And cypresses asleep, as when Antinous,
With eastern-scented brows and poppy lids
Looked forth, godlike, upon them ;
To catch, perhaps,—the myrtle boughs between—
Glimpse of that unforgettable, sweet sea
That heard of yore Sicilian shepherd boys
Piping across their shining pastures,
That still, upon the shores of Ithaca,
Beareth the blue, Homeric, star-entangled tide !

ALL SOULS' DAY

Quiet with amber light
The pale enfolding afternoon;
In sleep the slow leaves fall;
Tranquil as misting tears or swoon,
The pendent blue that bears
No cloud except the daylight moon.

Opal, a-drowse, and vast,
The river takes its southward way;
And southwards sweep the birds,
Swift and mysterious and grey. . . .
Do so the gusty dead
Wing the warm air in troops to-day?

Surely this peacefulness
Of feathered fields of golden-rod,
The wistful, songless trees,
And asters clouding from the sod,
Them, homing, lure from out
The bleak infinitudes of God.

Oh, surely all the south
Our prayers and dear remembrance make
Calls from the cold, blue tides
Their wings to-day, and they forsake
Their solemn ways for us,
Remembering death and all the ache.

ALL SOULS' DAY

And thou, so lately one—
Not all the new adventuring
In starry realms can hold
Thee from return. To-day thy wing,
Pausing above my heart,
Doth courage and assurance bring.

A PAGE'S ROAD SONG

(13th Century)

Jesu,
If Thou wilt make
Thy peach trees bloom for me,
And fringe my bridle path both sides
With tulips, red and free,
If Thou wilt make Thy skies as blue
As ours in Sicily,
And wake the little leaves that sleep
On every bending tree—
I promise not to vexen Thee
That Thou shouldst make eternally
Heaven my home;
But right contentedly,
A singing page I'll be
Here, in Thy springtime,
Jesu.

SOARING

My heart is a bird to-night
That streams on the washed, icy air.

My heart is a bird to-night
'Twixt the stars and the branches bare.

My heart is abroad to-night
Rushed on by the fierce, crystal air.

No nest will it seek to-night
In the branches, ice-brittle and bare.

Wide-wingèd my heart to-night
With joy on the surge of the air.

What matter that spirits of night
Make shudder the trees, lean and bare!

FOR MUSIC

O singer, canst thou summon up
 The early blue-bird's wing?
The pang of those uncertain days
 That swoon with unborn spring?

O singer, canst thou summon up
 The crimson of the rose,
The silver gloom of April dawns,
 The breathless unreprieve;

The yearning in the dark divine,
 Deep woods, a-bloom and dumb,
The starry, tear-blurred nights of May
 That bring delirium?

O singer, canst thou summon up
 In music all the spring
Whose crowding incense caught my heart
 So long ago?—Then sing!

AUTUMN TUNE

Sweeter than spring, sweeter than spring,
These brown and blue and lingering
 Soft days that wing
Like filmy dreams across the world,
One by one unfurled, unfurled,
Where the ripe fields slumber and glitter and swing.

Sadder than song, sadder than song,
The choral drowse with madness strong
 That all day long
The locusts lift to their god the sun,
For joy of the life that is almost done—
Raptured and shrill and regretless throng.

Wilder than wings, wilder than wings,
The flight of the golden leaves when springs
 The fear that flings
Them swirling and shining up from the bare
Dark branches that reach to the calm of the air
Where death is a-dream on azure wings.

A SEA-BIRD

I cry, I cry
Into the night.
Along the waves
I gleam and fly
A haunted flight;
A cry, a cry
Into the night.

Lone, alone,
And the sea is mad.
Mourning, mourning,
Broken and strown,
It nurseth the dead,
The dead alone—
And my heart that is mad.

ECSTASY

(After Verlaine)

The moon shines now
White in the woods;
From every bough
Cometh in floods
A voice divine . . .
O love of mine!

The pool of jet,
Deep mirror sees
In silhouette
The willow trees
That moan and gleam . . .
O hour of dream!

Tender and vast,
A peacefulness
Drifts downward past
The shadowless
Star-purple night . . .
Hour of delight!

IN AN AUTUMN WOOD

Thou, too, O bronze-eyed darling of the feast,
Under the deep, brown leaves and faded sky
 At last wilt lie,
Forgetful of the joy thy beauty leased.

But ere that time, how many times, alas,
Wilt thou with careless hand sweep all the vain,
 Taut strings of pain
That are my heart nor hear the hurt chords pass.

Almost I wish to-day that thou didst lie
Beyond the leaves, unsummonably still—
 So well, so ill
I love thy loveliness that hears no cry.

PRISON SONG

Beat, beat, wings of my heart,
Stormy and swift as you will!
Beat and break, but the walls of the world
Will hold you captive still.

Oh, the bird of the moon flies into the west
To dip in the sun's lagoon,
And, following her, the wild geese blur
In the depths of a golden swoon.

But, heart of mine, O bird of my heart,
Tho' they curve to the sunken stars,
You follow not with the strain of your wings,
For between—the iron bars.

THE RETURN OF THE LEAVES

Leaves and the sweet-choired blue;
And my heart set free again.
Leaves, leaves and the dew;
Free, but not free from pain.

The laughter of June is shed;
And my heart gives heed again.
But, ah, for youth that is fled,
Fled, with all but its pain.

MARCH MAGIC

Once more the fickle birds return
 Across the sloping seas,
And strew the tender fields again
 With their old melodies.

The sky is magic as the month,
 Low sun, high stars between,
The icy winds have washed it clear;
 But it, too, dreams of green.

The boats are breathing on the sea;
 They cannot wait for men;
Some undertide has brought them word
 Straight from a blue-starred fen.

Unpiloted they steal away,
 No man shall see them soon,
The sea birds follow but a mile,
 Then leave them to the moon.

We, too, shall steal upon the spring
 With amber sails blown wide;
Shall drop, some day, behind the moon,
 Borne on a star-blue tide.

Enchanted ports we, too, shall touch,
 Cadiz or Cameroon;
Nor other pilot need besides
 A magic wisp of moon.

ST. FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

Daytime? The stars quite gone?
O brother Sleep, you tripped me in my prayers,
And bound me in your scarves of colored dreams!
Pray God the brethren find me not
Flat in the dew and just awake.
Fie! fie! thou slug-a-bed!
Up! kneel to thine orisons—compose thy robe—
And get thee from this green and idle wood
Back to the world!
Alas, the summer air hath blown
Shame from my heart! Jesu, the prayers must wait—
Light-hearted day on naked feet
Runs thro' the woods, and I must watch her here
Shaking the boughs above my head,
And winning with her rogueries the leaves' applause.
Delicious so! . . .
Idler, pagan, Francis, up! Ah, well—

Prophets and patriarchs!
What company is this?
The blessed birds of God—
Silent and orderly, row on row,
Thick on the branches, scholarwise on the grass—
Sparrows and swallows, bobolinks and larks—
Tiny and big, and gay- and hempen-gowned—
Attentive all and silent; eyes on me—

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Littlest children, my brothers—O birds,
Good morrow! For your presence thanks. . . .

And yet, may I confess—

Beseeching you will not mistake my ignorance
For lack of gentleness or knightly courtesy—
I know not quite what mission draws you here?
Only has Father Noah seen such multitudes.
Is it, perchance, with tree-top news you come
Requiring such deliverance?

Alack, I have not any roof at all,

Much less an ark.

But should your needs petition one, content your-
selves;

The brethren shall be willing carpenters.

Your watchful eyes and silence, courteous and prim,
Betray I have mistook your coming's cause.

Perhaps on your first-waking flights,

Beholding me so quiet in the grass,

You thought me dead, and came with friendly haste
To hide in leaves my obvious corruption.

Three hops and a silver chuckle—

Robin, irreverent robin, wrong again?

Ho! ho! at last the dear God sends me sense!

A sermon 'tis! Robin, I guessed!

Come nearer, darling children, close!

O lovely cloud of wings! O tiny storm of twitter!

What barren faith was ours

To pass you by these many days

Without one salutation in Christ's name,

Or news of His impending kingdom once!

Let these poor words win your forgiveness,

And His, whose frailest ones we have o'erlooked.

ST. FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

Brethren! . . .

Ahem!—

(Saints! what text can serve!)

“In those days Jesus said:

My Father’s kingdom may be likened to

A grain of mustard seed,

Which, being sown, is smallest of all seeds,

But, growing up, is greatest of all herbs,

Till in the shadow of its branches lodge

The birds of heaven.”

Yet, no! these words He never spoke.

He knew as you or I

The idle ways of summer, and the fields

Where poppies in their silken kerchiefs crowd the
wheat,

And, when the dry, quick autumn winds had stripped
their scarlet,

He, too, had seen their tiny million seeds—

Mere dust beside the mustard’s burliness.

Mark nodded or forgot, poor fisherman!

How often thus they understood Him not!

And in these far-off days their surface words we seize,

Set up, adore, and miss the gospel underneath,

Forgetting they were simple men,

And He, dear God, who only aimed at simpleness.

But still He did say Heaven’s kingdom was a tree,

A mighty tree with branches’ room for all,

And sunny babblement of leaves where all

His wingèd ones might skim and shine at ease.

O little, brown minores,

Come—let’s skip the text! But after it

In any well-conducted sermon comes, you know,

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

The exhortation. Now I should proclaim
The evil of your lives and urge repentance!
When summer dawn is here? and only choristers?

How may it be?

What evils may I warn your hearts against?

What words of guidance give?

None come to me. . . . No ownership is yours,
But winds and trees and evening waters and the sun
Are yours in largesse, without counterclaim—
The eighth commandment was not meant for you!
I would not coax you from your ways of lechery;

For not your will, but God's,
Fills all the April air with mating and the chirp
Of love. Obedient be to His good season.

I think ye do no murder, yet—

Sometimes it grieves my very soul to see
The lesser brethren fly your swift pursuit.
If God directed so you take your livelihood,
'Tis well, but spare, I pray, their tiny span of bliss
If food less petulant may serve instead;
Nor their destruction ever make your sport.

Little children, no rebuke is meant;

I only pray your gentleness. . . .

Indeed, indeed, He set your flight
Above the paths of sin! Advise? conjure?

I do you wrong. Rather, I think,
He put it in your hearts to come to me

Not judging I could give
Morsel of help or little twig of truth,
But that the comfort of your presence might be mine.
For sometimes, little brethren of the woods,
We, in the common world beneath your trees,

ST. FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

So clearly see the weakness and the sin about,
That only them we see, and we forget
The holiness that still persists, the light, yea, God,
Himself!

Belike He feared for me such hour,
And in His care sent you, His seraphs of the trees.
For you, tho' of the world, share not its taint,
Nor breathe nor know its sin.
If we lived so, the sudden curve
And anxious fanning of soft plumes
Would stir our bending heads,
And off we'd fly to—to that same mustard tree of
yours!

Was ever such a sermon?
I, no text; no morals, you!
Let's call it then no sermon, but instead
I'll sit within the shadow of this tree
With you companionably close,
And while the hoyden breeze on emerald wings
Lets through the shimmering lances of the sun,
And hums aloud for wantonness—we'll gossip!
Oh, not of sin or other grave concern,
But right familiarly of what we know—His life.
Saints! what a fluttering
And sparkle of expectancy!
Upon my lap at last, robin of mine?
'Twas thus about His knees that day
The children came and begged for tales,
Vexing poor Matthew, and bequeathing us
His dearest page.

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Let me see . . . ah . . .
The book is not so full of tales for birds;
'Twas writ for men, you see.
I doubt not men had far the greater need—
'Twas not because he loved you less!
But now I do recall a story; one you'll love—
That day by Jordan!
They had been urchin comrades years before,
That lonely Jordan prophet and our Lord,
But him the wilderness and stars and solitude
Had swallowed up this many a day.
So now his eyes were full of tears
To see, across the grass where all the people sat,
The little boy he loved run to him, call his name,
And in the cool, clear water kneel
To beg his blessing.
The desert had not dried his heart away;
And so he wept, and clasped Him close, and
prayed. . . .
But I'd forgot the Holy Ghost!
He could have been
A scarlet cloud of seraphim, a lightning bolt,
Fire or darkness, what He willed!
But what chose He? what creature honored there?
From out of Heaven He flew—a lovely dove!
That was a day for birds!
Sure, you must love the Holy Ghost—and keep
Your hearts and plumage clean and bright for Him,
And make your morning baths baptismal in a way!

ST. FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

Another story I recall, dear children.
But whether it be writ or only dreamed
I cannot say. . . . Gethsemane . . .
My heart is there so much, I do remember more,
Perhaps, than they that set it down. . . .
It is not spring talk for a golden dawn,
But even you, gleamers of God, should know.
Before the end He longed to come once more
To that familiar garden that He loved.
Its olive trees and sandy barrenness
That drank the moon were home to Him,
For other home He had not, save
Such waste and lonely places off the way
As men forgot. And so that night, the last, He knew,
That He might pray together with the twelve,
He came unto the garden where it lay
All full of moonlight and of silence,
And with Him brought for comfort them He loved.
Indeed, He loved us all—too well, too well—
But ah, the mortal of His heart had need to choose
For special tenderness, those few.
How tired He was! Oh, weary unto death;
And needed most mere human love!
But they whom He had chosen, whom He loved,
His own, His very own—they slept!
God! God!
Had Lancelot or Tristran been His knights,
They had not slept. . . .
When those we love have failed us in our need
There is no bitterness undrunk for death. . . .
That night, as thus He lay,
After the prayer, too tired for tears,

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

And even God forgot Him with the rest,
I think that one of you, beholding from
The shadows where you hid, that agony,
Trembled and paused and bent your head,
Then, for you knew no other, quavered forth
Your silver serenade for healing to His heart. . . .
The torches and the sudden faces broke
Your song. . . . Likely He never heard . . .
But only you bethought to comfort Him that
night. . . .

They slept . . . God! Let me back into the world!
Lest coming suddenly again
He find them sleeping still.

Good-bye, good-bye!

Remember to give thanks each day to Him
Who made your feathers clean and fair and warm,
Who set within your hearts clear springs of happiness,
Who shares with you His home, the sacred sky.
And I beseech you, little brothers, think
On us, who, soaring, never leave the earth.
O swallows, should you see, when evening comes,
One leaning from his darkened window, dark,
His eyes unlighted, bitter with the day's defeat,
Toss where your vagrant flight may catch his gaze;
For, as you scatter up the golden sky,
Haply he may remember Jacob's dream,
The ladder and the wings, and, holpen, send his heart
In God's light careless way to climb with you.

And you, sweet singers of the dark,
That tune your serenades but by the stars,
Love gardens most;

ST. FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

For garden casements do unlock themselves
With magic silentness unto your spell,
And music unto sleepless eyes doth bring
The lonely solace of unloosened tears.
But most, you morning choristers, that haunt the
 eaves,
Whose little voices like a hundred stars
Shine just before the sun, tapping with dreams
The lazy sleep that lingers on our lids,
Fail not to keep your matins clear for us;
And should you know, by some bird craft of yours,
The room wherein an almost mother lies,
Choir your sweetest there, as tho' the babe to come
Were son of God—for so he is!
Again, farewell!

 I cannot leave ye thus!
 O Father, I have failed!
 What truth can they recall
 That I have given them?
None, none! And now the hour is past!
Birds, birds, stay yet and harken this last word,
Too simple to be long remembered; but, forgot,
Taking the shining and the wings
And all seraphic meaning from the life we know—
And you that glisten through the lovely blue,
Not singly, but in shoals and multitudes,
Bear witness to the truth that I would tell:
That child of God, man-child or bird-child
Or silver-wingèd star-child of the night,
That lives apart, unto himself,

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Unsharing, unsolicitous, and free,
Hath vainly lived; for life, this present life,
Is but the throe to brotherhood!
Behold our hearts, which we forget or hide,
Are fashioned so in likeness to His own,
That only joy of all can bring them bliss,
And every special woe must bring them pain.
So long as one,
But one of all His children knoweth grief,
So long we sorrow too. Nor can there be a heaven
Till hell be tenantless. . . .
The love we bear hath neither gates nor walls
To keep men out, but tendereth itself
A refuge city to the shelterless,
Calling across the tempest-shadowed plain
Unceasingly, "Come in, come in!"
And, for they will not come, but scatter far,
Grieving and hurt and blind into the storm,
There is no peace for us, and all our days
Are hungered for the sight of them that stray,
Are empty to the cry that sounds in vain,
"Come in, come in!" . . .

So must it be—now.

But I perceive another day not too far off;
And in that day there shall not one remain
Uncleansed of tears and sin and every stain;
And in that day, behold, the golden droves
Of His light creatures shall invade the dawn,
Shall stream across the hush beyond all stars,
And people those celestial places He hath planned.

ST. FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

Some day. . . . But now . . .
I go to them that have the greater need.
God's blessing steep your hearts in peace,
And all your deeds in patient tenderness.

My name! . . . They call me through the woods!
Quick, quick! away! . . . Here, Egidio! I come!
Up, up into the leaves, lest seeing you
They say there was a miracle!
Go! But birds, my birds, come back to me!

ARCADY LOST

The cherry bloom and robin time of year
Again is come; and we that shepherd still
Among less heavenly pastures feel the fear
Of spring again, and all the tears that thrill
But never fall. Last night, across the shine
Of iris-tinted skies, I heard the dim
Enraptured song we knew, the dire divine
Music, that once, beyond the violet rim
Of pain, could waft us clear to where, our own,
Th' unstable faery shores of ecstasy
Burn in the twilight of an April sea.
Our music came last night to me alone.

No more may song nor petalled fluttering
Upbreathe frail, frail delight as in the days
We clung together here. Instead, they bring
The pain of hearts that, glamorous still with
spring,
Break, and the dread of star-lit, lonely ways
Where once, O comrade mine, we heard them sing.

ON LEAVING TAORMINA

O almond trees, beneath whose fruited shade
I lay these summer days and saw the sea,
The hills of Mola, and Calabria's jade,
Good-bye! Perhaps the god that yielded me
Such luxury of happiness, these clear
And brimming hours with you, will, in his grace,
Yield none again; and, summer, finding here
Your branches green, will find again the place
I love, not me. Thro' all the leafy years,
Others will come and love your loveliness;
Love with a heart as gay and free of fears
As mine, and, leaving, leave their souls no less.
But, ah, for me, when spring stands in the door,
Take on, I pray, one shade of pink the more.

DUSK: ASSUAN

Serene, he mounts the minaret of day ;
Where purple spreads the world his footsteps pause.
Splendors from whence he rose still flame his grey
And amethystine robes to golden gauze.
Priestly and pure, he stands within the curve
Precipitous that fronts the chasmed west.
The blowing birds that wove his hem in swerve
And arabesque of jet, flicker to rest.
And now his voice, a tide of silence, pours
Across the desert's pallor and the palms :
"Come forth to God from all your darkened doors."
Who pause for prayer? Partake the sacred calms?
Pass and repass the women with their jars ;
But faithful come those worshipers, the stars.

THE COAST OF BOHEMIA

Like some still angel who, in toilless might,
The empyrean cleaves with unstirred wings,
Heedless of his proud speed save where it springs
About his feet like blown, quick-curling light—
So passed our ship in soft, gloom-charmèd flight,
Midmost a huge, drear shade of sea and air,
Voiceless, indissoluble, saving where
Prowwards awoke two folds of fiery white.
The wash of dim infinity, the swoon
Of vasty quiet hushed us. Then the least
Dawn quivered—nay, the east dreamed of the moon.
Breathless, we watched. Again! Ah, elfin east!
The white day leaped upon the world. The miles
Of sea flamed loose—and then we saw those isles.

TO THE MISSISSIPPI

They came from fierce, burnt Spain to seek for gold
Upon thy shores, and with superb, strange prow
Dazzled the wilderness. Their proud, swarth brows
With gorgeous lust of gems and trove made bold
The river folk feared as the gods of old.
But, lo! thy gods awaking, the deep drowse
Of death their chief assuaged of quests and vows,
And him, not disillusioned, thou didst fold.
No dreams of gold or jeweled glebe now force
Thy stream with ships adventuring; and tho'
Thy flood in yellowed opulence doth flow,
'Tis not from stain of deep, corroded treasure.
Imperial indolence is thine and pleasure
Of hot, long listlessness and moody course.

IN DALMATIA

A brotherhood of bleached, air-scourgèd peaks
In desolation watch the Illyrian sea.
Them twice the lidless day brings ecstasy ;
Their leperous fronts but twice a splendor freaks.
Once, when the anguish-heedful dawn unspeaks
Their woe with rich, deep-blushed divinity ;
Again, when 'neath eve's balm they tower free
Like Tyrian tents of purple-amorous sheiks.
As they with light, so man with vision twice
Scorns pain. First, when the bowl of life in bliss
Youth holds, sees all—grape, dregs, and sleepy spice—
Then stoops his head to drink as tho' to kiss.
And last, when to the verge of death he strives,
Pauses to gaze adown, and, smiling, dives.

INVOCATION

Sleep of the coolèd lids and breath of flowers,
O sleep of youth, dew-sandaled from the leas,
Throated with music of ensilvered showers
And silken winds that flash against the trees;
O summer sleep of passionate innocence,
Clean as the morning stars of doubt and pain,
If dreamful, not, oh, not at the expense
Of tears, but fresh with news from fancy's Spain—
Revisit with thy trancèd healing sweet
These eyes that have forgot almost thy spell,
Sail back with all thy joyous-freighted fleet
Down the long azure of my spirit's swell.
And for thy traffic with that brooding stream
Bring back the purple to my hills of dream.

TO CHATTERTON

Immortal boy ! whose years scarce reached my own,
And yet were filled with all the kinless grief
Devolving on old age, without relief
Of stagnant brain, of nerveless blood and bone—
At dusk, when wind-swept autumn woods are lone,
I, who of Fortune's bounty am the thief,
Gold-filled, I muse upon thy life, so brief,
So passionate, and, envying thee, I moan.
For dreaming thus, there comes a specter thought
Which fastens on my soul and leaves it grey
With fear. If Death, who found thy field so fraught
With golden harvest, now to me should say
“Enough, 'tis Autumn”—God ! no harvest yet
Have I, and still my fields are green and wet.

THE SILENT SINGERS

And Proserpine, still fragrant of the air
And upper brightness, bore him children—him
Whose heart, not knowing Sicily, was bare
Of songs, whose sunless mouth was dumb. That grim
Illimitable cold was alien
Always; and always, hopeful of the song
Of birds, she leaned and thought to find again
Those blooms that watch the tearless stars so long
They weep. When to her kingdom came the dead,
Still glistening with tears and asphodel,
Forgetting all save home, their eyes she read,
Wherein the sweet, far earth seemed yet to dwell.

.

Behold, the blue South in our hearts like wine—
But Pluto's mouth, O Mother Proserpine!

WILD GEESE

When naked winter on the midnight falls
With icy macerations, hook and flail,
They come—with rush of wings and signal calls—
The mighty birds that home the north, full sail
Upon the blast. Their unseen cohorts high,
Breasting the stars, make purpose proud to shun
All pausing, till beneath them, tranquil, lie
Day and the silver marshes of the sun.
But should the floor of darkness festal grow,
As far beneath some town unbraids its lights,
Routed, deceived, heart-set to gain the glow,
They drop ; nor join again the sunward flights.

Was it their cries I heard, remote, withdrawn,
Or spirit choirs dark-flying towards some dawn ?

FAILURE

For them that on the mountain fight beneath
The visioned ensigns of the unknown God,
Tho' battle-anguish be their only wreath,
Failure their palm, their victory the sod—
I have no tears. Compassion not that band,
Patriots, poets, dreamers, men of prayer,
The common reachers after right. The hand
Impelling them thus blindly to lay bare
Their hearts to that unequal contest, grants
Solace divine for their divine attempt.
For them that know not strife, nor hear the chants
Precedent to the bloody end's contempt—
For them unloose your tears! Their life is sleep,
Unvigilant, unwounded; they but sheep!

EX ÆTATE

Not for more hours of bliss I make demand,
O life! So many thou hast flung with hand
Of summer. Grant instead for winter's hem
Of sunshine, certain memory of them.

TO MILTON

As well house up the homeless Bedouin stars
And tent them permanent on the night's great desert,
As thy steep thoughts to circumscribe and fix
With human tears or home or human love;—
Thou nomad of God's universal night!

TO LUCREZIA

Pause we within the sunset, love ;
Rare is such time—so lovely and so passionless—
And sweeter far than when the proud, gold morning
Withers the dew with scorn and in his youth.

Pause here and let me speak
As lover never spoke to one he loved.
How clear the west, unpinionable, and all gold,
As tho' to cleanse us for the coming of the stars !

Now even we are worthy of the truth ;—
I, to lay bare, and thou, to hear.
But yet, the words may stab ; nor am I brave—
So, pr'ythee, turn from me thine eyes,
Nor let me see thy perilous, curved mouth,
Crimson as flame, and cold as blooms at dawn.
So. (My words seem shackled—
Sluggish with frosty truth). . . .

That moment long ago when thee I saw,
And straight the whole world 'came invisible,
That time of passionate oblivion,
Once seemed to me the incarnation time
Of love, the heaven-sent, the Paraclete !
Thus have I told thee ; thus believed.
But, ignorant, I lied.
No spirit of the Lord anointed paused
Within the portals of my heart on hallowed feet.
Not that, but some young god,

TO LUCREZIA

With blown, bright hair and fillet golden, came,
And, stretching forth the blossoming rod of beauty,
Upon me wrought a pagan spell.

Not love, not love,—nor then, nor now!
If Christ should halt beside this spot to touch my
hand,

It would not be to claim my soul as friend;
But I should hear the sound of fearful things
That rush into the sea.

This fierce obsession of my waking hours,
This visioning that makes night ecstasy,
It is not love. And this the proof.—
Ah, heart's desire, should thy strong beauty fail
As fails the beauty of the fields,
Or foam blown where the seas are beachless,
To me long, sweet forgetfulness would come,
And summer's ease, once known, now long ago.

Thy words are music rich within mine ear,
But yet, I listen not if there be meaning in them.

Thine eyes, like winter seas,
Dim grey, with thought of green and fear of blue,
Thy listening eyes, immeasurably still—
Oh, are they still with dreams, and sleep
Deeper than waking? Or with the drowse
Of inner lassitude and sheer vacuity of soul?

I dare not guess,
But, careless, drink their cool, Circean sorcery.
Hast thou a heart? I cannot say;
For, where it may not be I once did watch
A thought surge, flaming all thy wintry white
To blossoming spring.

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Mayhap, thy soul twines deep with God's.
 Mayhap . . . I know
Thy body's whiteness and old Grecian grace . . .
As to one seeking glimpse of the huge sea,
 Might come as hindrance on the slopes
 An almond tree,
Leaning in ecstasy of petalled beauty, so
Betwixt thy soul and mine riseth alway
 This barrier—thy loveliness!

A PAGE SINGS

Where leads my way?
By trees that flutter in the wind,
By fields half blind
With dew, by halls where I may find
At afterday,
Heathen or fay.

I pass and sing.
With cool-eyed youth and all delight
I am bedight—
From morning light to morning light
Adventuring.
One song I sing.

Beneath the blue,
The lithe trees lean my song to hear.
It is so clear
Even their blytheness it can cheer—
For fresh and true,
'Tis all of you!

WINTER-FEAR

The rain has come.
Gone the empurpled air
Which hung upon the golden wreckage of the trees.
The rain has come,
And one no longer sees
The sun. The radiance that lay upon the vair
And crimson of the earth is vanished with these.

The wind is up.
It greits; nor dazzles now
The quiet lanes with ruined autumn's gorgeousness.
The wind is up,
But tho' the boughs confess
Its potency, of jeweled tribute they allow
No leaf. The earth, Danaë once, is treasureless.

Winter is come—
The night-cursed, fearful days,
Stained and blurred with tears and querulous with
pain.
Winter is come,
And if my heart refrain
Most bitterly from backward looks when pitying stays
The sun, then, God! what agony these days of rain!

TO A MOCKING-BIRD : FROM TAORMINA

The nightingale has a golden heart,
And a silver heart the wren ;
But, oh, for me the bold, bright bird
That sings with the heart of men !

His music is not of seas forlorn,
His magic is not of tears ;
From tilted throat his raptures float
And tumble in laughter and jeers.

He does not cease when daylight dies,
But he sings right on to the dark ;
The stars or moon may die or swoon,
In the drip of the rain—O hark !

He does not cease when spring is done,
And his mate with love is fled ;
A fairer thing than love or spring
Is life. And the fall is red.

Sing, nightingales and silver wrens
And fairy throats that can ;
But the bird I love is the darling bird
With the free, proud heart of a man.

AFTER READING THE RUBÁIYÁT

Still burning, let me cast the cup of youth aside,
Or else, with one deep, purple draught,
Crush it and toss its unregretted pieces wide
To windwards, and the latter days abide.

What if the spicery of summer be forspent,
And night's own argent madness gone?
The shining Bacchanal of youth was always rent
By cries the circling dark and stars had sent.

And tho' warm-lidded lechery was sweet, I knew
The discontent of higher dreams,
And how the red-lipped sweetness changed and staled
and grew
A thing the dewy dancers feared to view.

O loveliest of all the wreathèd revellers,
Break, break the cup, the wine forswear.
Courageous, thee and me a lordlier vintage stirs—
The blood of life's unraptured warriors.

A WINTER'S NIGHT

The wind has revered the splendor of the night.

Westward upon the green and saffron light
Of dusk it passed, with vasty wings and voice not low,
Fleeing with awe the splendor of the night.

Were I the wind to-night, the tangled stars and snow
My aweless wings' unfettered might would know.
O joy, the tranced splendor of the air to shake
And starward hurl like spray the errant snow!

Ah, for the tyranny of furious wings, to wake
Superb, this ecstasy of calm; to slake
My passion-winnowed heart with tempests' windy
woe!
I would to-night the storms were all awake!

AT PARTING

And so we part!
You with your vague, sweet smile,
I with a breaking heart;
You to your vague, sweet ways,
I where the failures start.

We lingered long!
You for mere idleness,
I for your mouth like song;
You for the flattery,
I for your beauty strong.

Our lips' last touch!
Yours cold as mere consent,
Mine colder were there such.
And you will never know,
And I have known too much.

.

Parting sublime!
Already you've forgot,
I will forget in time.
You sigh without regret,
And I have heart to rhyme.

BEFORE DAWN

Breath of the dawn, breath of the dawn,
Breathe on my heart of thine eagerness.

Up from the sea, youthful with thee,

Be drawn

For a spell and a healing to me

In my stress.

With the shining of silver yet on thy feet,

With the fleeing of stars that are flameless fleet,

With the cool of the sea for the cool of thine eyes,

Arise

And come to my need!

From the grey of the unstarred eastern skies

Oh, speed!

Up from the sea, up from the sea,

Come with thine eagerness, girlishly;

Sweep with the quiver and gleaming of thee

Dark from my heart like dew from the lawn;

With the cool of thy coming, half stars and half sun,

Deliver my soul from the deeds that are done—

Breath of the dawn, breath of the dawn,

Purify me.

LONGING

At last the sunset and the quietness;
The iron clutch of day loosened at last.
Here where the sky is limpid loveliness
And depth on depth of peace, I may forget
The fretful work-a-day and midgy round of
things . . .

A smothered pain the long, long day.
Nor does forgetting come with dark and nights of
dream;

But sweet with pain and filmèd tenderness
This hour of the pity of all things. . . .
Grey as slow tears, the dusk blurs out the trees;
The colors ebb beneath the western marge;

And homing come the birds—
Not singly come they, but,
With throated happiness, together.

But we no more shall come together home,
Nor hear their twittering gusts,
Nor watch the deep west come more deep
Till we behold the stars,
So bright they must but now have wept.

Oh, for one hour to-night,
One little hour with you—
To touch your hand—
To lean within the halo of your perfume—
To watch, as those sweet many times,

LONGING

Together, love, the young, white moon,
Like some strange petal blown into our round of space
From out the cool abysms of the night,
Where unknown blossoms bloom for unknown eyes
To gaze upon in wistfulness. . . .
A little while to watch,
And then, together, home.

PHAON IN HADES

To-day the very dead would love his face ;
And, loving them, I wish that to their place
Of woe his feet might find awhile the way,
And ease them with perfection for a space.
His beauty is so beautiful to-day.

As, when its freight of dew is blown away,
The grass uprises, so would they uprise,
Those ancient dead, and shake their anguish grey,
Breathing his coolness and his glad surprise
As 'twere the blow and glittering of day.

Ashine with clinging petals and late tears,
Sweet with aroma of Sicilian green,
I see the dear, dear dead make way and lean
To catch the summer of his mouth, the sheen
Of laughter in those eyes that wisdom fears.

And, ah ! Persephone ! She hath forgot
The pallor and the poppiéd heaviness—
Upon her wine-red heart her hand is hot.
If thus the very dead, 'twere sure excess
Of blame, were I to love his beauty less !

GIRGENTI

So many here have struggled, fought the fight!

Life after life so many here have flung
As incense to the gods, that served—for what
Save Cerberus' toll to nothingness?

Of what avail to them, to us,
Their gaunt resistance and their trust?
Across the clear, sad light of centuries,
Their epitaph reveals what line of comfort?
Those that with lit, courageous eyes opposed
The mean, the merely earth, the less than highest,
Was recompense or special profit theirs?

Did their names less profoundly plumb
The chasms of oblivion
Than theirs that never fought,
But, lightly submissive, spread
The purple for their summer hearts
Within the garden's cool,
Called for the golden cups, the snowy wine,
The honey-comb, and Aphrodite's flutes?
To which was happiness the booner comrade?
Sweeter than chaplets hold you sweat and blood!
Than easy pomp, strife and hot tears!
Which likelier served the gods?
Behold the gods of both in ambered death
Of fairy tales and poets' guile!
Which hold in heritage
Elysian meadows and eternal May?

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Poor trade, indeed, hoped immortality
For hot lips and the certain spring!
Ah! but the nobler struggle did bequeath
 Impetus, blossom-bearing warmth unto
That blind and mighty impulse to perfection—
 The race's slow, incessant upward surge!
 Dreams! dreams! About, about, behold
 Their bastard-souled successors,
 Legitimate in blood alone!
Here once were millions; gazing hence, one saw
The high-hung walls, the teeming market place,
 The colors and the colonnades,
The curving city's brilliant amplitude. . . .
 There hangs upon that northern crag,
 As some dirt-wasp had hovelled there,
 The drab inheritor of all that purpose;
Slattern of villages, where sat the lily-crowned!
 Golden Girgenti!
 Of soft Sicilian cities goldenest!
 Gone, all gone thy gold,
Save where the rhythm of the ripened fields
 Sweeps mellowing to the sea;
Save where the lonely temples lift their pride,
 And on their maimed and desecrated fronts
 The evening light lays heavenly pure hands.
Gone thy gold; thy beauty, childless, gone;
Gone alike the strugglers and the strife.
Only the bland, unflashing blue, the Libyan,
 Holds yet its immemorial loveliness.

GIRGENTI

Thus from the lofty temple steps at gaze,
My thoughts came faltering.
But my proud heart leaped up in glittering mail
And called :

Tho' the gods be dead or never were ;
Tho' death blow out the flame and soul be dust ;

Tho' generation follow generation
Level, no higher footing gained, no hope
Broad day will sometime flood the race
Upon some mountain won with agony ;
Tho' all dissolve and leave no mist of gold—
Yet vision only and the strife therefor
Shall I accept as life !

If here, across this present's windy peak, I gaze
Back, back across the infinite years,
And forward thro' the infinite to be—
Above the human rabble, past the soft
Guzzlers against the fertile breasts of life,
I see, I do behold, how proudly, them
Whom blind nobility, heroic uselessness,
Impelled to scorn all acquiescence, brute
And easy ; to strike to the blood's last crimson for

The dream of their own making ;
Defenders, tho' creators, of their own
Divinity ; soldiers in sweat, in blood,
Before the mouth of death.

So long as one remain, but one,
To shout the battle cry and take no quarter,
So long the velvet ease of life is infamous,
So long I stand with him and beard the world !

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Girgenti, O Girgenti, vanished all thy sons !

And only spring with equal glory spreads
Across thy hills its billows of deep bloom.

Empedocles, thy loveliest, is gone ;
And Dædalus is dead ; his wings no more
Shall darken up the east or shake the sea ;
Nor any make return whose name thy mouth
Smiled to repeat. Yet not to them
My heart gives hail across the grave.

Oh, not to them whose heralding
Sufficient heaven gave to their attempt.

But to thy sons, that, silently,
Oblivion-crowned,

Battled as tho' the very gods made part,
And from their golden ramparts called applause.

Them do I hail across the heavy mold ;
And them unborn, foredoomed to like red death,
Whose swords submit not chance, nor fate, nor
flesh. . . .

My brothers, proud, tho' unworthy, let me stand with
you

In stubborn rank against the wall of doom,
Opposing meek acceptance of the world ;
Scornful of scorn and vileness and black sloth ;
Battling, we know not why ; dying, we care not how ;
Glimpsing our kinship with the farther stars ;
Defeated always—but how splendidly !

THE HAPPY ISLES

How comes the spring in those far lands of yours?
Tremulous as here—and full of wings?
Full, too, of secrets and the hint
Of half divine events?
Do twilights there unfold
Blue shadow petals to the swarm of stars?
And does the hem of rapture darkness wears
Glisten, as here, with tears?

This hour that we loved most,
My long forgetting like a garment falls.
How long away! From you how long!
Failure and tears and strife,
The intermittent bubbling up
Of that deep loneliness
All know, yet know not to resist—
These come, but coming, wake not surely in my heart
Its lack of you.

But yours, yours always, are the Happy Isles!
Their transient, fortuitous discovery—
Rarer each year that sears and falls—
Brings back the need of you.
And every failing breath sent from their shores
Seems meant for two.
Let but the darkling hour as now

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Move mystical upon the tides of spring,
And from the vague horizon's verge they rise.

 The air is unheard music that we knew;
Ahead, familiarly, the purple shallows shine;
 I turn, I turn
 To whom alone with me is sovereign there,
 And, missing you,
Miss, too, the opal of their magic coves,
And scant the fugitive, bland hour.

But, no! that thought would shade your eyes,
 Tho' fresh with immortality.
Oh, think not you can ever bring me pain—
Or pain such only as clear sunsets cast;
Their shining wings uplift us and their peace seems
 home,
 But sadness is their soul,
And all their lustral loveliness wells up from tears.

Perhaps, there, too, in those far lands of yours,
Springtime comes flowing like a tide of dreams,
 Mysterious, on bluer wings,
Laving in magic more profound the curve of lovelier
 shores.

 Yet, even there, perhaps,
Your unaccustomed eyes yearn back
Across the spirit-footed ocean of the air,
And you are homesick for the earth,
Twilight, and stars that are not worlds but flowers—
Homesick, perhaps, tho' Paradise be yours,
For me and for those isles. . . .

THE HAPPY ISLES

They fade; the world returns,
And with them fades
The conjured vision of your bidding place.
Soon may they come again;
Soon; on the waters blue of twilight,
Tremulous, full of wings,
The purple of unrisen stars about their base,
And on their crest the calm of sunset.

EPILOGUE

O God, author of song
And of the will to righteousness,
Thee have I loved in guise of him,
The golden-haired, the beautiful,
The incense-tainted leader of the Nine,
With dim, averted eyes and prescience of pain—
Knowing Thee frail and perishable, fit for youth.

The gardens of the air were mine to walk with Thee,
Dewed with the stars,
Swept with the tinted splendors of the suns.
Yet was the bliss too blissful to commend,
And Thou, I knew, wert half divine, no more.
Thro' the live luxury
Of that aerial rapture always
Crashed the vast battle sounds of earth,
Where, tho' the many died, myself died not,
Where, tho' the many bled, myself unwounded
went.

The pagan god, Thyself half-seen,
Is not enough, O God!
Here, on the breaking verge of youth,
Secureless from the fringes of the forward storm,
I face the riven grey and call to Thee,
O God of righteousness, to Thee!
Must I forswear song and the darling rapture,
Thy gifts, tho' taintless of the earth, yet beautiful?

EPILOGUE

And bend me to the living of the life, half-armed,
Lacking not valiance, but the accoutrements where-
with

Valiance may save itself from scorn?

O God, hear Thou my faith which is as rock:

Thou art! All else is circumstance,
Random and unessential incident—

Save this: in me Thou art.

And so my moment wheels to its sure end
Huge with divinity, its orbit as the sun's,
Accounted and accountable as all
The chaos-floating, golden universe.

But mine to mar;

Mine to deliver unto death
True to the disposition of its essence,
Or in fulfillment bastard utterly.

Eternal Thou; but I

Swift-passing, in the passing powerful
Myself to darken with deliberate choice.

One life, but one, is mine.

I would not have it pass

Failing its high, potential utmost,
A quivering of music-shaken strings—no more.

Giver of bliss and pain, of song and prayer,

Thou God that dost demand

Single allegiance of the soul that sees

Thee dual only and at enmity—

Hearken my choice, my supplication hark.

Tear out the rapture and the wings—

Take back thy gift of song—

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS

Take, take the madness of the olive and the vine
 With all their ecstasies, unless they be
Not oil for gleaming of the games and clustered gold,
 Not wine for leafy laughter of the feast,
But aid and chrismed healing for the wounds
 Of them that smitten lie on that broad way
 Known to the dusty sandals from Samaria.
Crush Thou, O God, the petalled crimson of my life,
 So Thou but mold the remnant clay
 To shape not all unworthy of the Thee in me.

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